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UNCLAS VATICAN 004751

SIPDIS

DEPT. FOR EUR/WE-LEVIN

E.O. 12958 N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [SOCI](#) [VT](#)

SUBJECT: JOHN PAUL II: 25 YEAR CHAMPION OF HUMAN DIGNITY

Summary

1. (U) Pope John Paul II marked the 25th anniversary of his Pontificate October 16 with over 70,000 well-wishers in St. Peter's square. The Pope is one of the most compelling public figures of the 20th Century, and continues to garner international attention even as he struggles with physical limitations of Parkinson's disease and ageing. John Paul II has transformed the Papacy, making it not only the spiritual guide to the world's billion Catholics, but perhaps the leading moral voice in the world today, respected and listened to even in countries with limited Catholic influence. Under his leadership, the Holy See has become a visible and effective political force for freedom, justice, and reconciliation. It has also greatly expanded its diplomatic presence, more than doubling from 85 to 174 the number of countries with whom it maintains diplomatic relations. The Pope's untiring determination to promote human dignity has distinguished every aspect of his papacy, leading him to place himself on the side of the poor, the disinherited, the oppressed, the marginalized and the defenseless. The United States has no better partner for achieving our primary national security goal of promoting human dignity worldwide. End Summary.

Champion of Human Dignity

2. (U) Pope John Paul II has put an indelible mark on the papacy and on the Church he leads. Elected to the Papacy October 16, 1978 with keen intellectual gifts, a tenacious will and clear, uncompromising values, he has traveled the equivalent of three times to the moon visiting over 1000 cities in his dual roles as pastor and statesman, evangelizer of the Catholic faith and promoter of human rights and freedom. What has most distinguished his Papacy has been his constant affirmation of the centrality of the human person and his or her dignity, and his ability to place this advocacy in the context of the modern world and the Church's traditional social teachings. For example, he took on the United Nations community as it dealt with women, population, and the family at Cairo and Beijing, and he has tirelessly campaigned against the death penalty and abortion -- defining these as signs of a culture of death. The Pope has shaped the Holy See into a moral compass that is listened to, if not always followed, by people on every continent.

3. (U) John Paul II's papacy has been marked not only by its message, but very much by its messenger. The Pope has brought the papacy to the world in a way that has revolutionized expectations of who a Pope is and what a Pope should do. Before John Paul II, Popes rarely traveled outside Rome. John Paul II, by contrast, has been the first truly international pope, one who has traveled to the most remote regions of the globe. In his travels, he has taken a message of hope and faith, expressed in his frequent personal appeals for peace, for human rights, for international justice, religious freedom, for medical ethics and in his innovative gestures of dialogue and openness towards Jews, Muslims, Orthodox Christians and other world religions. His message has also been reflected in his calls to close the gap between rich and poor and for prosperous nations to embrace immigrants fleeing oppression and poverty. The target of an assassin's bullet, he has in recent years suffered painfully and publicly with Parkinson's disease and a series of ailments that have limited the once athletic Pope to a rolling throne used to move him where he needs to go - a limitation that has not, however, dampened his determination to continue to carry out his mission.

Shepherd of a Restive Flock

4. (U) While revolutionizing the Holy See's engagement with the world, the Pope has also sought to re-package Christian practice and teaching. In his speeches, encyclicals, personal reflections, and pastoral letters, in his focus on

youth and family, and in his defense of human life, the Pope has sought to explain the complex nexus that draws together God, man, politics, Church, and civil society. In this effort, he has won the admiration of millions, but has also been pilloried by critics on the left and right for his positions on birth control, the role of women in the church, homosexuality, and the excesses of capitalism and secularism. His personal popularity has not always translated into action or adherence among Catholic

faithful, many of whom ignore the Pope's teachings on birth control, divorce, abortion, and homosexuality. While the church is growing in Africa, the Americas and Asia, in the Pope's home ground, it is gasping for survival in an increasingly secular Europe that was unwilling to include a reference to Europe's Christian roots in its constitution despite the Pope's persistent lobbying of European leaders and people. Nevertheless, the Pope's pre-Millennium meetings in Rome with hundreds of bishops from the five continents generated a series of internal policy documents that will guide the Catholic Church's activities in those regions for decades. (Septels will explore the Pope's contribution to and challenges in specific regions.)

Crusader for Peace

15. (U) From the beginning of his papacy, the Pope has sought not only to engage Catholics, but to reach out to the world and embrace its many cultures, religions, races and ethnic groups. In doing so, he has built bridges between cultures and religions that have helped overcome divisions in troubled regions of the world. The Pope's messages and efforts on behalf of international peace have been a prominent and consistent feature of his Papacy. Since his election, the Pope has issued annual Peace Messages to world leaders and civil authorities that have encouraged nuclear disarmament and opposed arms transfers, analyzed the economic roots of armed conflict, promoted national reconciliation efforts, explored the links between peace and the dignity of women and children, and expressed support for the role of the United Nations to guarantee world peace. The Pope has also issued specific appeals for peace and placed in motion the Holy See's diplomatic machine when the clouds of war have rolled over the horizon -- most recently over the war in Iraq.

16. (U) But Pope John Paul II has not only talked about peace, he has engaged both himself and the diplomatic machinery of the Holy See to achieve peace in the face of conflicts in many parts of the world. In his nearly 1700 meetings with heads of state, heads of government, and other senior government leaders, issues of war and peace have inevitably been high on the agenda. The Pope's diplomatic efforts were crucial to avoiding war between Chile and Argentina over the Beagle Channel border dispute in 1978. This set the tone for a papacy that recognized the potential of timely mediation by a Holy See acting "super partes." In another conflict involving Argentina, the 1982 Falkland crisis with Britain, Pope John Paul II invited the Catholic cardinals from England, Scotland and Argentina to Rome to celebrate a Mass of Reconciliation with him in St. Peter's. Observing then that "peace is an obligation, peace is a duty", the Pope announced that he would visit not only Great Britain, to which Queen Elizabeth II had already invited him, but also Argentina. His subsequent papal visits to the two countries underlined his role in promoting reconciliation among parties to a conflict.

17. (U) Pope John Paul II has likewise supported efforts to achieve reconciliation between conflicting parties in troubled areas such as Lebanon, the Balkans, the Great Lakes, and East Timor, where Vatican diplomats were particularly active in achieving a resolution to a long-fester zone of conflict. Though not all Vatican diplomatic efforts have been successful, the Pope has never weakened in his conviction that the Holy See should do everything possible to prevent war, encourage fractious parties to dialogue, and promote the greater value of peace over war. This conviction has put him at odds with the United States over both the Gulf War of 1991 and the Iraq war this year. In both cases, the Pope believed that the international community had not exhausted all peaceful means short of war, though he also criticized the actions and inactions of the Iraqi government that had provoked both conflicts and acknowledged that decisions of war and peace must be made by legitimate civil authorities.

18. (U) While the Pope is a man of peace, he is not a pacifist. In fact, he has frequently called for "humanitarian intervention" or peacekeeping in trouble spots such as Kosovo, Bosnia, Central Africa, and East Timor -- even if that meant using force to "disarm the aggressor." He has also strongly condemned terrorism, and

recognized that the United States needed to respond in self-defense after the September 11 attacks. In fact, he has often observed that genuine peace must be built of a foundation of liberty, justice, truth, and love, and he recognizes that the international community needs to strive to create these conditions if it is to achieve a more

peaceful world. That is why he has so vigorously advocated religious liberty and human rights during pastoral visits to many countries, including Cuba and Nigeria in 1998.

Advocate of Reconciliation and Dialogue

19. (U) The most original of John Paul II's efforts to craft a culture of peace have been his continuing and deepening efforts to promote inter-religious dialogue and to overcome religious divisions - including those among Christians. For example, the Pope has done taken sometimes dramatic steps to appeal to the Orthodox and Protestant churches, as those closest to Catholicism in doctrine and practice, to strive for unity not just in the abstract but also in the concrete -- even to the extent of asking for their input on how a Pope should exercise his ministry in an ecumenical age. In Greece, the heartland of the Orthodox Church, the Pope made a sweeping apology on behalf of Catholics for misdeeds committed over centuries against members of the Orthodox Church saying it was time to "heal the wounds" that have divided Eastern and Western churches for nearly 1,000 years. He has been willing to talk systematically with Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and animists. Wherever possible, if it did not already exist, Pope John Paul II has set up continuing commissions and other fora in which honest and serious efforts to understand and resolve differences in theology, science, philosophy and culture can be constantly addressed.

10. (U) Pope John Paul II's spirit of humble certainty has often translated into significant gestures of repentance and reconciliation -- gestures sometimes criticized by his most senior advisors but which have helped overcome centuries of distrust and division. In particular, he has made great strides to repair Catholic-Jewish divisions. After becoming the first Pope since Peter to step inside a Jewish synagogue, John Paul moved to open relations with Israel in 1993 and in 1997 authorized a Vatican conference on the roots of anti-Judaism in Christianity. In 1998, the Holy See published its official document on the Shoah, acknowledging Catholic failings in failing to counter a climate of persecution that resulted in the holocaust. During the jubilee year of 2000, he lead his most senior advisors in a Vatican "Day of Parson" to apologize for Christianity's errors towards Judaism, Islam, and Protestant Christians. Later that year the Pope prayed at Judaism's holiest site, the Western Wall, and, in an unprecedented gesture of reconciliation, asked Jews to forgive centuries of Christian sins against their people. "We are deeply saddened," he told the Israelis, "by the behavior of those who in the course of history have caused these children of yours to suffer and, asking your forgiveness, we wish to commit ourselves to genuine brotherhood with the people of the Covenant."

11. (U) On a visit to Syria that same year, John Paul reached out to Muslims with words of sorrow and prayed in a Damascus mosque, observing: "It is my ardent hope that Muslim and Christian religious leaders and teachers will present our two great religious communities as communities in respectful dialogue, never more as communities in conflict. For all the times that Muslims and Christians have offended one another, we need to seek forgiveness from the Almighty and offer each other forgiveness." He has also visited other predominantly Muslim countries from Morocco to Kazakhstan, earning respect and drawing large crowds eager to see the Pope who entered a mosque. Among the most visible manifestations of the Pope's commitment to breaking down religious barriers have been the three interfaith meetings he hosted in the Italian town of Assisi. The 1986, 1993 and 2002 encounters brought together Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists and representatives from a variety of other religious expressions to pray for peace. In 2002 following the September 11 terrorist attacks on the U.S., the delegates in Assisi denounced all violence in the name of religion and rejected the idea of a war of civilizations or cultures. Many religious leaders have commented that these gatherings were only possible because of the Pope's moral stature and record of reconciliation.

12. (U) The Pope has not limited his reconciliation efforts to religious matters. In 1992, on the Senegalese island of Goree, he made a heartfelt apology on behalf of Christians who took part in centuries of slavery. Describing the slave trade as an "unknown holocaust and an enormous crime," he said it was imperative to confess with humility

this crime against humanity." John Paul II also had no qualms about rehabilitating Galileo Galilei and encouraging scientists to continue their inquiry into the "big bang"

theory behind creation. As a churchman Pope John Paul II has never been afraid of engagement with the scientific world because, in his words, "we know that the truth cannot contradict the truth." While such gestures have sometimes been criticized within the Catholic Church as threats to traditional doctrinal positions or as undermining the prestige of the papacy and the Catholic Church, Pope John Paul II has been willing to accept this criticism for the sake of healing wounds and overcoming divisions.

Catalyst for Freedom

13. (U) When John Paul II took up his papacy, communism was all but bankrupt in Poland and the conditions necessary for a popular revolt against the Soviet-sponsored regime were in place -- economic stagnation, state persecutions of intellectual and religious leaders, and a series of workers' strikes and student protests. Into this sea of discontent, Karol Wojtyla returned to his homeland in June 1979 as the Pope. During open-air Masses and other events, millions of Poles saw or heard their native son challenge the moral premise of the totalitarian system, demand freedom for the church, and affirm the right of the workers to organize. Poland's leaders heard his courageous admonition, "Order flows from respect for the rights of the nation and for human rights." The papal attack on the morally bankrupt system continued in subsequent visits, when John Paul chided the Polish premier for his regime's human rights abuses and reminded workers that "solidarity" means that burdens are shared, in community -- not through the class struggles promoted by Marxists. The Polish Pope reawakened the spirit of resistance and freedom in the Polish people, giving them the courage to seek the freedoms too long denied.

14. (U) In this case, as in many others during his Papacy, the Pope's direct approach broke with traditional Vatican policy, which previously had emphasized official dealings with sovereign powers, either through concordats or dialogue. However, Pope John Paul II recognized that in the emerging milieu of global communications, the church would have greater impact by "acting" within civil society rather than acting in collaboration with sometimes corrupt or bankrupt national governments. The Pope carried this message directly to the masses - not only in Poland but also in Hungary and the former Czechoslovakia. His engagement in these communist countries became a catalyst for change, resistance, and freedom, which together with the U.S. efforts to oppose communism, exposed the hollowness of the communist system and hastened its demise.

15. (U) In Poland as elsewhere, the Pope has been constantly aware of the power of his presence and his moral voice. His ability to read the ecclesiastical and political situation of a particular region or nation led him to develop travel itineraries designed to achieve the most benefit -- masses with the masses in Poland as communism suffered its death throws, a visit to the Philippines during the Marcos regime to cement his friendship with Cardinal Jaime Sin and to give a papal "nulla osta" to the eventual peoples' revolution, an accusing finger pointed at Jean-Claude Duvalier in Haiti and a bold call for change in that dictatorship, a blunt challenge to Sudan's Islamist leaders that there could be no peace without justice and respect for human rights, a controversial visit to Chile and the seeming embrace of the Pinochet regime that in reality strengthened the local church's efforts for human rights and led eighteen months after the papal visit to a process of reconstructing Chilean civil society, a national plebiscite to move beyond military rule and to restore democracy.

Comment

15. (U) In his inaugural homily 25 years ago, the Pope told the world: "Be not afraid." This admonition has been the distinguishing characteristic of his pontificate, as he has repeatedly acted as no Pope had done before, reshaping the Papacy and public expectations of the Pope. He has brought the Papacy to the modern world with a directness and immediacy that was unimaginable before his pontificate, and made the Holy See a central player on the international scene -- as seen this year in the stream of world leaders who called on the Pope during the lead-up to the Iraq war. Now the fourth-longest serving Pope in history, John Paul II's increasing frailty will give his presence, at both the ecclesiastical and international level, a new quality -- physically more subdued though still morally compelling.

Our reading is that the Pope is still very much in charge of the Vatican, with an intellectual acuteness that continues to impress his closest collaborators. As he reportedly told one of his Cardinals, "I don't run this Church with my feet." It is likely that the Pope's international travels will be more limited, though he has a number of invitations pending for the coming year. Nevertheless, we can expect his moral reach will continue to extend worldwide through his appeals on international issues, teachings and commentaries. As one of the world's leading individual voices for human dignity, Pope John Paul II -- even with his physical limitations -- remains a vital partner for advancing U.S. efforts worldwide to champion human dignity. As we seek to promote freedom, break down religious and cultural barriers, promote development, relieve human suffering, and stand up for human life, we have no better partner than John Paul II.

Nicholson

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2003VATICA04751 - Classification: UNCLASSIFIED